

SELECT BOARD MEETING

Monday, February 1 – 6:30 p.m.

Town Room, Town Hall

MINUTES

DRAFT

Call to order:

Meeting was called to order by Ms. O'Keeffe at 6:30 p.m.

Attendance:

Present: Stephanie O'Keeffe (Chair), Alisa Brewer, Aaron Hayden (Clerk pro-tem), Diana Stein, Gerry Weiss, Larry Shaffer (Town Manager), John Musante (Asst. Town Manager)

Others presenting: Nancy Gordon

Public comment: Nancy Gordon presented her personally financed survey of 278 randomly selected recent voter's preference on issues related to an over-ride. The survey showed more support for an override than similar surveys in 2007 and 2008.

Quarterly budget update: (Copy of report is on-line)

John Musante presented the Select Board the quarterly update of the Town budget. He noted that the budget was smaller than the year before and very difficult. Also that at the mid point we were half way through most expenditures and had received half the revenue as expected.

Gerry Weiss asked about where the annual surplus goes

John Musante explained it went to Free Cash – He explained that several years ago the reserves were allowed to fall to a level low enough that our bond rating fell and cost of borrowing increased. Today we have an excellent bond rating because we have been building reserves and are executing our financial plan. He also noted that Free Cash does not simply grow by the surplus each year, last year we spent \$.9m from Free Cash to support Marks Meadow School.

Stephanie O'Keeffe noted that last year's surplus also went into free cash balance

Larry Shaffer added that the surplus results from 2 sources; revenues that exceed expectation, a favorable change in a contract, gift or new bldg permits and good management by dept heads.

Stephanie O'Keeffe asked whether we knew that the new model for funding LSSE was working since we are half way through the year and how well it was tracking.

Larry Shaffer noted that revenue was less than expected and the model needed to be recalibrated going forward. LSSE is evaluating all its programs partly on its cost to operate which was not possible before.

Stephanie O'Keefe mentioned that this new model has dramatically less tax support and Larry Shaffer noted it was an 83% reduction of tax support.

Alisa Brewer noted another position was cut out of the FY 10 LSSE budget.

Presentation and update on the North Amherst PRP:

Larry Shaffer reported that with the help of a strong team there is a proposal for Town Meeting to consider. The project to get a large tenant for this property is an important step toward the goal of increasing the tax base by \$200m in the years and can increase tax collections by \$1.6m each year which will help the municipal budget.

Mr Shaffer has worked with the Patterson for the conveyance of 60 acres to the Town first by a no cost "pre-option" (pre-Town Meeting) and three year long options of \$40k each year until the Town can execute a purchase and sale agreement.

Gerry Weiss wanted clarification on the option:

Larry Shaffer explained the option is the gateway to pursue funding and building infrastructure and finding a tenant without the risk of the property being sold elsewhere. There should be an article in Town Meeting this spring to support the option. The options also give us priority access to 43D grants and an expedited (State) permitting process including up to a \$100k grant to study infrastructure and marketing this major site.

Gerry Weiss asked if users outside of those allowed by PRP zoning were going to be considered:

Larry Shaffer assured us that the project will have to fit in PRP – the existing range of uses allowed in our PRP is a great way to start to sell project area.

Ultimately the options could lead us to a 90 year lease with 7 increments; after 25 years we can buy the property for \$5m plus a cpi increase. The user of the site will be assigned the lease, the Town will not pay any of the lease. There are nearby properties that might be purchased to add to this area.

The project needs the support of the Town to succeed – we have the resources the private sector doesn't to get it ready especially infrastructure permitting.

Stephanie O'Keefe wanted to know the link between Town infrastructure and the tax base.

Larry Shaffer answer that this \$100M project will net \$1.6 m annually. The infrastructure installed depends on end user's need for water, sewage and road improvements which will cost on the order of \$2-5m. Infrastructure funding can come from grants or Development Incremental Financing from taxes (a provision of MGL Chapter 43D)

Alisa Brewer asked whether the Town Meeting article would be from the Planning Board since it involves Chapter 43D.

Larry Shaffer didn't know but would love to have PB endorsement. It includes an expedited permit process.

Alisa Brewer ask whether a 43D application is a Planning Board responsibility and if they have time in their schedule to be ready before Town Meeting

Larry Shaffer explained that 43D allows us to access grants from the State and expedites the State permit process. We don't need to speed up our permit process especially since Amherst permitting goes well. Mr Shaffer is looking forward to presenting the project to all the permitting boards. Those boards have time frames but we will not be required to speed up our process.

Gerry Weiss as if the request for \$40k for the first year's option will be before Town Meeting as part of the FY 11 budget

Stephanie O'Keefe wondered if the expenses will be paid by project taxes, how to answer the inevitable question.

Larry Shaffer replied the (\$40k) option makes area more attractive to end user and improves our ability to access property. An option allows us to dictate process for 3 years.

Gerry Weiss asked about the size of the current commercial tax base.

Larry Shaffer recalling the numbers stated we had about \$2B in total tax base and \$70m in commercial tax base - the goal is to expand the commercial tax base by \$200m in 10 yrs. This project goes half way.

Alisa Brewer noted that Amherst wasn't alone looking to do this kind of project. We're joining Belchertown, Northampton and Greenfield in this kind of work and we might be able to learn from their experience.

Stephanie O'Keefe noted that this project is definitely in line with Select Board's intentions for expanding tax base.

Town Manager's Report:

League of Women Voters hosted a forum on the Town's emergency preparedness'. The Fire Department, Police Department, and Health Department joined Mr Shaffer in presenting and answering questions. Watch for the re-runs on ACTV.

The Bangs Center space is being reorganized since Health Services were moved from the top floor to the first to be more accessible and Social Service and a fitness room from

Cooley Dickinson will be on the top floor. Also way-finding is being reviewed to add electronic signs. Mr. Shaffer had been meeting with the Board of Health and Council on Aging about changes in the Bangs.

Alisa Brewer wanted us to all acknowledge that Mike Kent has taken a position as chief away from Amherst and we will miss him.

Larry Shaffer appreciated that Police Captain Kent was a Cop's Cop that he will miss him and his special relationship with UMass.

Litigation status (packet material on line)

Larry Shaffer presented the report which is broken into three parts; closed litigation, active labor disputes and outside litigation. Many cases were closed last year and the remaining are relatively few for a Town the size of Amherst. There still are some cases that involve land use.

Personnel Policies

Gerry Weiss requested the Select Board comment on our role with exit interviews which is good personnel management. His main thought is to have Personal Board conduct the interview, who would then report to the interviewee's and that persons' supervisor. This would assure that two levels of supervision are always involved and benefit.

Diana Stein noted that often people don't want to do them (exit interviews) since they might impact future employment in a small community like ours.

Gerry Weiss felt it important to engage in the new process IF the interview is done since it is a voluntary process.

Larry Shaffer noted that we do exit interviews but don't commit the results to writing to encourage people to do them. The information gleaned is very valuable.

Stephanie O'Keeffe felt the Select Board should be notified of the exit interview if it involves the Town Manager.

Gerry Weiss will work to create a policy on exit interviews that fits into current personnel guidelines for presenting to the Select Board as a proposal.

Minutes Tabled until next meeting

Malt Liquor License Diana Stein moved to accept an application by the University of Massachusetts for a special license for February 10th between 5 and 9pm. Aaron Hayden seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

FY 11 Budget questions:

Stephanie O'Keefe presented this recurring agenda item as our opportunity, on close review of the budget, to ask specific questions on the budget. She also reminded us that it is good to e-mail questions ahead of time to allow a more complete answer:

Gerry Weiss noted the uncomfortable situation in budgeting COLA amounts for non-union employees of 0% increase, before the Personnel Board has advised the Select Board of their vote. He stated that Personnel Board will vote on the non-union COLAs for FY 11 on Feb 5th.

Stephanie O'Keefe noted the 0% increase has been discussed for many weeks by the Select Board and that the Personnel Board has had plenty of time to consider their support of it.

Larry Shaffer noted that the process of budgeting 0% first, before Personnel board had their vote was a matter of budget process not disrespect for the Personnel Board, which did indeed know of the 0% cola for weeks.

Gerry Weiss commented that a complication in the timing of the process is that others have a contracted COLA while non-union workers is at a disadvantage – and the non-union employees include some earning the lowest wages. The Town Manager's procedure was "perfect" but still uncomfortable so Mr. Weiss shared his discomfort with the Personnel Board. The Board decided to meet as a board and make a decision without going to rank and file since they were rushing to get done before the February 12th deadline.

Larry Shaffer has spoken with the non-union employees explaining his dedication to keeping as many people as possible on staff and how reducing the COLA helps.

Gerry Weiss asked whether a 0% COLA would preclude 2 lay-offs?

Larry Shaffer answered that it was likely.

Gerry Weiss asked about surpluses – we are aware they occur because of good budgeting by staff – whether the Select Board would want the trend to continue or not – maybe we could use it for something.

Diana Stein felt the surplus is a critical budget cushion.

Aaron Hayden noted that the recent modest increases in the Free Cash, that the surplus has allowed, saved the Town significant money because the increasing surplus reduced borrowing costs.

Alisa Brewer noted the need for the Select Board that we are aware of the surplus as a pleasant surprise

Larry Shaffer reminded us that the Finance Committee and Facilitation for Community Choices Committee both recommend the reserve grow. Also that the dangerously low levels in past have exacerbated the structural deficit.

Gerry Weiss will discuss these issues with Budget Coordinating Group.

Budget Coordinating Group update (handout attached)

Stephanie O'Keeffe described the make-up of the committee with representatives from the Select Board, School Committee, Finance Committee, Library Trustees and Town staff. The BCG is moving forward from last year's process (which just dealt with cuts) and is trying to better protect the core as recommended by the FCCC. The BCG is working to understand budget priorities and recommend an override:

February, 8th the final draft of override is to be ready
February 12th the final draft will be approved

Right now a \$1.9m override seems to be the likely number that will restore the most vital cuts. The cut list has also been reduced by the recent change in the State funding picture. BCG will distribute restorations proportionally among budgets to restore the absolute worst cuts. For the Town a restoration of \$350k restores all AFD and APD cuts.

Diana Stein stated the getting an override this year allows us in following year to collect the full 2 1/2 % increase even if we don't collect the full override amount this year. She asked what happens if we need more than the override and state aid provides this year?

Stephanie O'Keeffe replied that we go to the cut list.

Gerry Weiss added that another option is for Town Meeting to appropriate funds from free cash.

Alisa Brewer noted the need, then, to have the cut list organized to match new funds with cut order (BCG is working on such a document; we'll have final draft of it Monday).

Gerry Weiss noted the Select Board and Library have their cut list but not the School Committee.

Stephanie O'Keeffe noted the School Committees are working as fast as they can in parallel with BCG process.

Decision: Gerry Weiss moved to remove cutting street lights from our restoration list
Alisa Brewer seconded

Discussion:

Diana Stein is concerned that the town will be "depressing" and less safe without the lights

Aaron Hayden noted that adhering to the principle of dark skies would turn certain lights off in any event. Also the process for selecting the lights will be a careful one making sure to keep lights that protect the welfare of the Town on.

Stephanie O'Keefe noted that the citizens who vote for the override and still see "their" street light turned off might not understand and be upset.

Vote:3 Yes (Brewer, Hayden, Weiss), 2 No (O'Keefe, Stein)

Updates

Warming Shelter

Gerry Weiss reported that the warming shelter is alive and well and serving 15-18 people each night. There have been 30 individuals using the shelter which gives us an idea of the need for it. There are 2 paid staff supported by the Waxman settlement and a huge volunteer and donated food effort coordinated by Kevin Noonan (please check out knoonan.com with chart for volunteer times and food pledges). Contact knoonan@knoonan.com. Mr. Weiss gave credit to Mr Noonan for creating positive atmosphere at the shelter. Mr Weiss also appreciated the help the effort has received from the APD (they even delivered soup one night). Also he gave thanks to the 1st Baptist Church for their support of space and members who have given their support. The effort was well coordinated all around.

Energy Task Force, Diana Stein reported the ETF is having their Energy Fair on March 24th

The Disabled Access Advisory Committee, Gerry Weiss reported that the DAAC will be looking at accessibility issues in the Mill River Park which is not accessible generally. Their recent work on curb cuts at Rte 63 may become a secondary issue to general access. The DAAC is also looking at 2 restaurants in town because of their accessibility. Alisa Brewer noted that the Mill River Playground is accessible.

Public Works Commission: Aaron Hayden Reported that the PWC completed their sidewalk plowing policy and the Select Board will get to review it very soon.

School Committee, Stephanie O'Keefe noted that, starting February 2nd School Committee meetings will be live on ACTV from Town Room with a new beginning time of 6:30 pm.

Encouraging minutes and agendas from committees. Publicizing committee agendas and minutes is important for the community learning about the critical function of the committees and the committee to encourage public engagement. The Select board expects committees to post their minutes regularly.

Each Select Board member is to speak with their liaison committees' chairs to get a report on their posting of minutes and agendas to the Town website..

Alisa Brewer commented that posting is not required by state law but Amherst expects it.

Stephanie O'Keefe offered that Kris Pacunas will train anyone how to put minutes up on the web.

Larry Shaffer will research and report back on the process.

Diana Stein observed that it is sometime a difficult job to compile and publish minutes.

Aaron Hayden offered to compile an e-mail list of committee chairs as a tool to engage them with the process and importance of getting their committee minutes up in a timely manner.

Alisa Brewer would love to have agendas posted, it gives citizens an opportunity to be involved with the committee business before hand, but posting minutes is critical. The actual legal requirements for minutes are much less than the typical minutes kept, the fullness and accuracy are Amherst traditions. Committees that have long times between meetings can post draft minutes

Annual report material will be forwarded from Alisa Brewer to Stephanie O'Keefe for printing.

Stephanie O'Keefe reminded all that February 12th is the deadline for annual reports from all committees.

Calendar

Dates for Town Meeting are set. Diana Stein will check to see if the celebration of the Jewish Holiday Shavout should preclude a meeting on May 19th

Alisa Brewer suggested that citizen's petitions be brought in before the deadline so they can be edited if needed.

Adjourn 10:20 without objection

Comments and corrections encouraged
Respectfully submitted;

Aaron Hayden

SELECT BOARD MEETING

Monday, February 8 – 6:30 p.m.

Town Room, Town Hall

DRAFT

MINUTES

Call to order:

Meeting was called to order by Ms. O'Keeffe at 6:30 p.m.

Attendance:

Present: Stephanie O'Keeffe (Chair), Alisa Brewer, Aaron Hayden (Clerk pro-tem), Diana Stein, Gerry Weiss, Larry Shaffer (Town Manager), John Musante (Asst. Town Manager)

Others presenting: Vivienne Carey, Tina Swift, Florence Stein, Andy Steinberg, Clare Bertrand, Stanley Gawle, Yuri Friman, Rick Spurgen, Vincent O'Connor, Hwei-Ling Greeney, Pat Holland, Mack Bays, Connor Ward-Sullivan

Public Comment:

Vivienne Carey of the Thursday Club to present a framed photograph of the mural painted for the Amherst 250th celebration parade. She asked that the Select Board OK the original (very large) mural being hung in the Munson Library. Claudia O'Brian, Chair of the Munson Trustees was also present. The idea was approved without objection.

Tina Swift the President of the SEIU wanted to correct a potential misimpression of a newspaper report that most people received a 10% cola since 2007 and in fact they received a 1% COLA in 2008. She was concerned the SEIU would be perceived as being greedy even though the COLA was bargained in good faith.

Florence Stern from the Personal Board reported on the Board's recommendation, with a "heavy heart", for no COLA this year for non-union employees. She explained it was hard to ask for no COLA but wants to see the Town survive and hopes we can come up with things that people do want. Ms Jacelyn-Crook(?), Pat Brock and Tony Butterfield of the Personal Board were also present.

Larry Shaffer spoke of his appreciation for their consideration for all the services that are being slashed. He explained that traditionally the Select Board works on this issue in July but given that we will be asking for Town Meeting and voters to make hard decisions they voted on it now – this is a signal of Select Board's intention.

After a brief discussion of the matter Stephanie O'keefe moved to accept the Personal Board's recommendation of no COLA for the non-union employees this year. Aaron Hayden 2nded and the motion was accepted unanimously.

Licenses:

New Taxi Business License:

Diana Stein moved to approve a new Taxi Business License for Mohamed Keffas. Aaron Hayden seconded and the motion was accepted unanimously.

New Taxi License

Diana Stein moved to approve a new Taxi/Chauffer license for Mohamed Keffas, Aaron Hayden seconded and the motion was accepted unanimously.

Special Liquor License

Alisa Brewer moved to approve a Special Liquor License for the Hurricane Boosters Dian Stein seconded and the motion was accepted unanimously.

Approve minutes:

Gerry Weiss moved to accept the minutes of January 26th as amended. Diana Stein seconded and the motion was accepted with 4 Ayes 1 Abstention.

Minutes for Feb 1st tabled until the next regular meeting.

Committee Appointments:

Diana Stein moved to approve Catherine Vorwerk-Feldman's appointment to the Hampshire Regional Preparedness Emergency Committee. Gerry Weiss seconded and the motion was accepted unanimously.

Budget Coordinating Group presentation and discussion:

Andy Steinberg (BCG chair) made a report which was followed by Public comment.

BCG was requested to look at the critical issues of override, amount and form and ballot language. The process still on-going has been a long time and has been collaborative involving the work of many people including representatives of the. Select Board, Town Manager, Assistant town Manager and Financial Director, Schools Superintendant, Amherst School Committee, Regional School Committee and Library Trustees.

The effort represents the best work for looking at critical needs of Amherst and the best way to support the town and the schools.

It is not a new process: it was recommended in 2008 by the FCCC that a committee should be formed to look at structural deficit even as the financial circumstances changed and we ended up facing an international recession that effect state revenues and state Aid.

Last year the Financial Committee and BCG made difficult decisions and identified the most essential services and how to provide those services more efficiently inside and outside of Town.

The FY 2011 budget had more than a \$4M short fall.

This worst case was a starting point and the BCG prioritized cuts based on most critical needs.

In the end they found it was impossible to serve the most critical needs without additional revenue and the BCG concluded an override of about \$1.9m was needed.

BCG considered different forms of override, menu, or pyramid, but decided – because was a collaborative process – the prevailing sentiment of committee was to have only one item on the override.

Public comment:

Clare Bertrand:

Commended the BCG for their work and process and noted that such an open collaboration was not part of the 2004 or 2007 budget process. She went to meetings and witnessed a focused and detailed look at a difficult situation. Even after serious cutbacks, pool, schools for examples, the gap remains.

She encouraged moving forward with BCG recommendation to keep budgets at a place that will sustain the community until economy comes back and the tax base grows again. Now we don't want to loose what is dear to us. Vote on what people want, keeping it as one motion keeps it from being (even more) divisive than it might be.

Thanks for collaborative process

Stanley Gawle:

Spokesman for the Amherst Taxpayers for Responsible Change (a group opposed to any increase in taxes) had several questions about unspent capital budget items that he gave the Select Board.

Yuri Friman (Town Meeting member representing Precinct 10)

Felt it was a complicated issue and should be on the ballot. It is important to property owners and non-property owners should make the effort to be educated on the issues and vote.

Rick Spurgen (Town Meeting member)

Recommend comprehensive override should be on the ballot. He also noted that we incur about \$3m each year for pensions liability and that now we have a \$100m unfunded liability. The idea we don't need the money is amusing to him – the Town desperately needs to fund the unfunded liabilities and should use left over money to pay them down - the sooner the better since the liabilities grow at a compounding rate. It is a serious long term crisis, buying a fire truck is fun, but the unfunded liability is a very big problem and needs to be addressed.

Mack Bays, 15 Smith Street

Urged to put the override on the ballot and offered the example of Argentina's dis-investing in public life and the results – a slide from a prosperous country not so long ago to third world status today. Their schools were on par with ours but today are decayed - we could be headed that way too.

The issue is complicated and simple – we need the revenue to maintain what we have and restore things we believe in. We need State and Federal tax reform and health care reform. The Select Board can't do those things but can do the work here. Property taxes are not popular though relatively progressive, more progressive than a sales tax. The main point is that we can't play calamity politics - we need to turn the corner on that strategy, we need to stop thinking about this teacher lost or that pool closed but rather what type of civilization do we want? The first step is to improve our Town.

Hwei-Ling Greeney (Town Meeting member representing Precinct 10)

She voted against overrides in the past. Today she is happy to see what town has done to improve the budgeting since last override: For example setting up LSSE as a self-sustained program. Also she is happy with efficiency measures; regionalizing the Call Center, increasing the tax base – she congratulated Mr. Shaffer on the Patterson deal. All these make her feel it is time to consider the quality of life we want and that we need to pay for it. Today in supporting the override she is sure it is part of a shared sacrifice meaning those on town payroll with step increase and COLAs. She was touched by the Police asking for no increase as their part of the shared sacrifice. Such sacrifices made before March 23rd showing good faith will get voters to be more willing to support. 10% of people are unemployed, 10% are underemployed and many have had no pay raise for many years. In September there will be a new round of contract negotiations – previous negotiations didn't pay attention to economic reality and gave 10% COLAs, this time try to, in good faith, observe financial reality in COLA negotiations

Vincent O'Connor (Town Meeting member representing Precinct 1 also a candidate for school committee) Noted a "lack of clarity" on one issue - whether the sum put on ballot should we need to use only 75% does the authorization go on to next year?

At the 4 Town Meeting on Saturday Senator Rosenberg spoke and gave assurance that on the regional school level the \$1.9m would stabilize the budget for 2 years. The Regional

School budget has greatest impact on Town since older students can't be saved from mandatory study halls. Mr. O'Connor supports a menu override since substance would get discussed not just the number. He also wondered how to get to funding without more "outrageous" cuts.

He feels the School is paying three times; losing their COLA, losing job stability, and citizens have to pay extra taxes. The use of reserves affects each budget differently. Schools are using their reserves. He noted that the Town puts "every cent" into reserves which he doesn't agree with.

Since elected officials are dealing with government daily it would be shocking if they didn't work together. It is not the process he finds people are familiar with, every voter has to be persuaded, would hate to see losing a vote here and there because they don't like a particular part of the Town. And new groups of voters can't be counted on to vote for tax. Need to involve more people by menu override.

Men and women would go beyond losing their particular menu item. Need some winners and with a lump sum there are no winners.

Pat Holland President of the Jones Library Trustees:

Wanted to tell us of the Trustees thoughts: The Library takes only 2.7% of town budget but even so it is important for their operations. The Library can't do it with gifts or endowment, the Town's support is required. The Trustees had different opinions on override, half support an override, the others thought individual citizens should decide so the Trustees took no position – which shouldn't be misunderstood as not supporting override.

Without the override the Library will reduce services:

Close Fri afternoons (chose that day of all others since it is lowest visitation)

Cut office asst and others which will cause longer lines at check out and while paying fines

Cut tech services, slowing re-shelving

Cut temp employees slowing shelving even more

An average of 1,000 people visit the Jones daily who in turn are an economic engine for town – and it draws people from other towns.

About the new gift from a Shutesbury resident (a second \$283k) - the decisions on spending is up to the Friends of the Library, to replenish the endowment or spend.

Connor Ward-Sullivan of Localocracy.org will take comments in partnership with ACTV to give platform citizens to explore issues.

Alisa Brewer noted that only registered voters who use their actual names will be on the Localocracy blog assuring a higher level of discourse.

Stephanie O'Keeffe noted the BCG recommended override will not exceed \$1.9m the current recommended amount from the committees. If funding improves the full tax will NOT be collected. If cost reductions or COLAs are better than expected we won't ask to spend it from a successful override.

Alisa Brewer noted the Select Board will make a decision on Friday for the ballot on March 23rd and a month later TM meets to approve allocations. And the Select Board doesn't set the tax rate until the fall. The first tax bill with the new rate won't be seen until later in the winter.

Gerry Weiss noted that people get information differently and wants to offer another explanation from different angle: the Town started out with a \$4.3m deficient for providing level services – an amount too large for an override. When state cut was reduced from 10% to 5% that left a \$3.2m deficit for level services. Administrators came up with \$1.3m cuts and money savings which left a \$1.9 m gap. \$1.9m is an “up to” amount, if a week later we find a COLA just came back we would set taxes to raise less - IF TM agrees and doesn't spend savings we will set tax rate lower.

Stephanie O'Keeffe re-asserted the \$1.9m is a Not To Exceed amount that adds \$298 a year for a property with the town average assessed value of \$334k.

Gerry Weiss wanted to repeat we will have cut and save \$7m in 3 yrs. We have worked hard to save and scrimp. For some the increase is a great deal of money to spend but we do get great services. The State and Federal tax systems don't work – There is a \$1.78b deficit in the country – about the same as the bank bailout. We don't take money frivolously.

Diana Stein wondered if, for example, the COLA was given back by the teachers that we wouldn't restore anything – is the point to save positions?

John Musante noted that by reopening union contracts and the success with APD allowed us to preserve two positions for the Police. Same is true of non-union, saved 2 positions. And the School Committee is meeting nightly to consider doing the same.

Gerry Weiss in discussing the street lights noted that Mr. Mooring identified some 400 lights that could be turned off. All these lights are in areas that they may not be needed - we should have list Friday or soon after.

John Musante noted that with the override we would have a sustainable budget that would need to grow 3.5% - a lower number than expected because of real improvements in insurance. Also he is looking to change pension rules which will incur a serious cost in the near future. The projected rate of growth in payroll assumed at 1% wages from bargaining. We can come in with balanced budget, with level services, even if there is a 5% state aid cut. This is part of a three year fiscal plan.

Stephanie O'Keeffe said we can sustain the Town with or without the override – the override will set the level of services we will sustain, severely cut or nearly level.

John Musante explained the reduced rate of expenditure growth and improved long term tax base growth will reduce the “wedge” between expenses and costs.

Alisa Brewer wondered how to show people the two different budgets with and without override.

John Musante noted the FCCC recommended spending within our means – that we need to fund recurring cost with recurring revenue. To do otherwise not sustainable. The capital budget as a percent of levy has been reduced by 1% so we will end up paying more to fix things later.

Discussion: Menu override vs a lump sum override:

Gerry Weiss argued for menu override since he felt the debate would more likely deal with the issues.

Alisa Brewer noted that the lump sum override had specific allocations; \$452k for the Town operating budget, \$1,139k for the schools and \$88k for the Library.

Larry Shaffer noted the school committees were working hard to meet the budget deadline. Their budget has many moving parts with several schools and towns. They will strike a balance to be true to their process.

Gerry Weiss noted that the School Committee suggested postponing the override. He also noted that teachers already have their “pink slips” and the longer we wait the more teachers will be lost – which is the same problem for the Town side. On the plus side the School Committee could come with a better recommendation.

Stephanie O'Keeffe observed that the School Committees in Pelham, Leveret and Shutesbury need to know what our override is for their town meetings to make budget decisions.

Alisa Brewer wondered how a menu override would be broken up?

Gerry Weiss said the BCG was considering 3 or 4 separate sums, 1 for each operational area.

Diana Stein felt the Town rejected the last override because we hadn't done our work. This override request is different since a lot of good and careful planning has gone into it and it considers the future. It would be difficult for the planning process if parts of the override failed.

Straw Poll: 3 in favor of a lump sum override and 2 in favor of a menu override.

Street lights:

Larry Shaffer to reconsider cutting the 400 lights from the budget. He received a list from Guilford and felt that pedestrian and bike safety would be reduced at a real cost .

Alisa Brewer allowed that some lights could still be turned off.

Diana Stein moved to restore \$48k for street lights to the budget. Aaron Hayden seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Next Meeting; this Friday, February 12th , to consider the final form and size of the override question for the March 23rd ballot.

Adjourned at 9:53 without objection

Comments and corrections encouraged,

Respectfully submitted;

Aaron Hayden

SELECT BOARD MEETING
Monday, February 12 – 8:30 a.m.
Town Room, Town Hall

DRAFT

MINUTES

Call to order:

Meeting was called to order by Ms. O'Keefe at 8:30 a.m.

Attendance:

Present: Stephanie O'Keefe (Chair), Alisa Brewer, Aaron Hayden (Clerk pro-tem), Diana Stein, Gerry Weiss, Larry Shaffer (Town Manager), John Musante (Asst. Town Manager)

Finalize Override Ballot Language

Larry Shaffer announced that the Fire Fighters' union agreed to a new contract that included no COLA for FY 11 which will reduce the size of the override by \$85k. The new number is \$1,680,441

Stephanie O'Keefe presented the Summary Points from the BCG on their final recommendation for a lump sum override. She reflected on the BCG process and how it included and affects other boards.

A wide ranging discussion on the pros and cons of a menu override or lump sum override followed.

Decision - Diana Stein made a motion to put a lump sum override on the March 23rd ballot. Aaron Hayden seconded and the motion carried 3 in favor (Hayden, O'Keefe, Stein) and 2 against (Brewer, Weiss).

Decision - Diana Stein made a motion to put on the ballot the question:

Shall the Town of Amherst be allowed to assess an additional \$1,608,441 in real estate and personal property taxes for the purposes of funding the following expenses: Town Operating Budget (\$452,252), Elementary Schools Operating Budget (\$400,000), Regional School District Assessment (\$739,195), and Libraries Operating Budget (\$88,994) for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2010?

Aaron Hayden seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Adjourn Meeting was adjourned at 9:22 am

Next Meeting

February 22nd, Atkins liquor license, fee increases for Bylaw violations

Comments and corrections encouraged,

Respectfully submitted;

Aaron Hayden